

# Complexities of Coalition Interaction in Military Operations Other Than War

A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Operations Department.

The contents of this paper reflect my personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

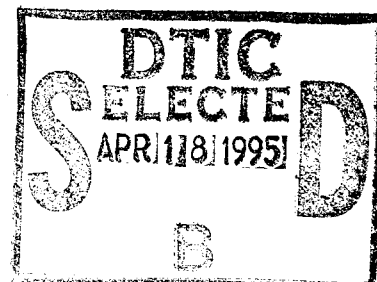
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# RULES OF ENGAGEMENT: COMPLEXITIES OF COALITION INTERACTION IN MILITARY OPERATIONS OTHER THAN WAR

## INTRODUCTION

In any operation involving coalition forces there are complexities which threaten to hamper the effectiveness of the mission. The Rules of Engagement (ROE) adopted by various coalition forces in Operation Provide Comfort and in Operation Sharp Guard demonstrate the diverse ways nations view their role in military operations other than war (MOOTW). Rules of Engagement are drafted and implemented within the framework of national policy, and as such, may differ greatly from the Rules of Engagement adopted by coalition partners. Diverse ROE negatively affect interoperability and unity of effort within the coalition and may result in difficulties for operational commanders attempting to carry out the mission. In order to minimize the confusion and potential risk to military forces operational commanders should attempt to adopt common coalition ROE or, at a minimum, ensure that they have a clear understanding of their partners' ROE. The ROE adopted by the coalition or participating nations must be flexible and robust, in order to accomplish the mission while providing forces with the ability to use force in self-defense or in defense of coalition partners.

Rules of Engagement are the method by which we tailor the use of force to reflect national policy. Drafting and implementing

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ROE becomes more difficult in peace operations because of their nebulous and abstract nature.

Difficult as it is sometimes to achieve unity among allies in wartime, it can be even more difficult to achieve it among partners in coalition for peace; from the perspective of nations providing peace troops, peace operations are less desperate than war. There is rarely a compelling threat or common enemy against which to coalesce. National governments are correspondingly less ready to spend blood and treasure, and less willing to shelve their national agendas temporarily in order to achieve the UN's political goal.<sup>1</sup>

Although we would think that the risk to military forces would be much lower in MOOTW and would perhaps be lower in an operation involving coalition forces, the risk may actually increase. Both the political risk and military risk increase in peace operations where the objective is ill-defined and the ROE are limited to a defensive posture. When coalition forces operate under peacetime ROE, tailored to that particular peace operation, numerous problems may arise which contribute to the risk of the operation. First, forces may all be operating under their own nation's ROE which may be quite different from the ROE of other coalition partners. Secondly, operational commanders may not even be aware of the parameters of their partners' ROE, a factor which detracts from the unity of effort within the mission. Third, even if common ROE have been adopted, different nations may interpret the language in different ways. Finally, the political agendas of various coalition partners may inhibit

their resolve to use the coalition ROE that have been adopted.

This paper will define and evaluate the nature of MOOTW, coalition operations, and ROE, and then examine the complexities of diverse coalition ROE in peace operations. The evaluation of several examples will demonstrate that the operational commander must ensure that coalition forces adopt common ROE through a memorandum of understanding or, at a minimum, the commander must ensure that he understands the ROE that will be used by his coalition partners. Application of these principles will maximize effectiveness of the MOOTW while minimizing risk to U.S. forces.

#### **RULES OF ENGAGEMENT**

Rules of Engagement are defined in JCS Publication 1 as "[d]irectives issued by competent military authority which delineate the circumstances and limitations under which United States forces will initiate and/or continue combat engagement with other forces encountered." ROE can limit the amount of force that can be applied lawfully under the Law of Armed Conflict to serve political, diplomatic, or operational purposes. ROE are the primary means used by the National Command Authority and theater Commanders to provide guidance to military forces concerning the conditions for and use of armed force. The U.S. has recently adopted a new set of Standing Peacetime Rules of Engagement which are premised on the inherent right of self-

defense as articulated in Article 51 of the United Nations Charter. For each individual MOOTW, there are operation-specific rules adopted to supplement the Standing Rules. Peacetime ROE generally limit the use of force to defensive responses to hostile acts or to exhibitions of hostile intent.

"ROE are complicated because of the legal and nonlegal factors affecting the degree to which force can be brought to bear during times of peace, tension, and war."<sup>2</sup> ROE serve the purpose of providing guidance on the conduct of operations and must always be written to be consistent with our national policy, military strategy, and with the assigned mission. Because ROE provide the guidelines and framework for our forces conduct in any mission, it is critical that each soldier or sailor has a clear understanding of the parameters set out by such rules.

#### COALITION BUILDING

Joint Publication 0-1 defines "coalition" as "an ad hoc arrangement between two or more nations for a common action." Throughout history, the U.S. has been involved in numerous conflicts and wars involving coalition forces and in recent years has become involved in numerous peace operations which have involved coalitions. Because of the political legitimacy afforded by coalition operations, it is likely that the U.S. will continue to be involved with international partners.

Although coalitions do afford political legitimacy, they

tend to restrict each nation's political freedom of action because they involve a compromise of sovereignty.<sup>3</sup> Building coalitions requires a relationship of trust, mutual respect, and cooperation between the coalition partners. Political agendas and mission requirements must be accommodated within the coalition. Nations do not share a common rationale for entering into coalitions, just as they have varying reasons for becoming involved in MOOTW. In any coalition there will be a constant struggle as nations seek to maximize their own ends while minimizing their political and military risk. In order to maintain cohesion within the coalition, we must attempt to understand the perceptions and motivations of our partners and work within that framework, making adjustments and compromises if we can. As Sun Tzu said, "know your enemy, and know your allies."<sup>4</sup> This premise becomes difficult to follow when participating in peace operations because forces are often unsure of who the enemy may be and unless there are common ROE, or an understanding of coalition partners' ROE, it is equally as difficult to "know your allies." Although the idea of compromise and cooperation is essential, it is not easy to employ. Even NATO, after forty years of existence, has no true common doctrine enabling its members to fight side by side without some confusion. Clausewitz captured the difficulties involved in coalition cooperation when he noted, "One may support another's

course, but will never take it as seriously as it takes its own."<sup>5</sup>

#### MILITARY OPERATIONS OTHER THAN WAR

The complexities of coalition warfare become heightened when dealing with MOOTW. In any conflict involving coalition partners there will be the never-ending tension of competing national self-interests. These tensions increase exponentially in MOOTW because each nation will have differing views on the nature of the mission itself. The lack of a clear cut military objective or threat, as we saw in Desert Storm, will result in political leaders having diverse plans and methods for implementing the mission. Coalition members will differ on the amount of force or weapons they are entitled to use, as well as on the amount of force they are allowed to use in defense of their coalition partners.

The principles of war dictate that combat operations be accomplished with quick and decisive strikes. On the other end of the spectrum, however, we have peace operations that are characterized by protracted involvement where objectives, are innocuous and sometimes risky. "Peacekeeping is not a soldier's job, but only a soldier can do it."<sup>6</sup> U.S. soldiers, in particular, are not trained or geared to participate in peace or humanitarian operations. The focal point of military education and training has historically been to mold the young soldier or



sailor into a warrior - to equip him/her with the skills to decisively win the battle and the war. Because of an ever-increasing tendency of the U.S., as well as other nations of the world, to become involved in humanitarian operations it becomes critical that we reeducate the soldier on the nature of the mission and on the amount of force he may employ in accomplishing the mission. That education process should be accomplished through training on MOOTW and by the adoption of clear and concise ROE. The problem becomes infinitely more complex, however, when you place a soldier with an unfamiliar mission, in an unfamiliar theater, alongside unfamiliar coalition partners, and those partners are not allowed to play by the same rules. Each of these unfamiliar components contributes to the risk that our soldiers now assume in what should be a "low risk" mission. Not only are U.S. troops exposed to personal military risk, but the political risks also increase in such operations. Peace operations are often conducted in full view of the international community with an overwhelming amount of media attention. Peace operations "frequently place soldiers in situations where they must make informed decisions at the tactical level that may have immediate strategic and political implications".<sup>7</sup> The international community expects coalitions to perform humanitarian miracles in places where the host nation is often hostile or resistant to the presence of foreign forces.

Likewise, the operations are politically risky from a domestic standpoint because the American people can not accept the idea that our citizens could lose their lives in a supposedly noncombatant environment.

Although these operations are politically sensitive, the U.S. does not, and must not, impose ROE that are so restrictive as to mitigate our forces' inherent right of individual and collective self defense. We must never again put our forces in the dilemma faced by the Marines in Beirut where the highly restrictive ROE required the troops to seek guidance from higher headquarters prior to using force in self defense.<sup>8</sup>

The level of risk is heightened in peace operations because "the initiative lies with the belligerents, rather than with the peacekeepers, who are forced to react to events in an effort to appear impartial."<sup>9</sup> Soldiers participating in peace operations generally have to rely on the goodwill and cooperation of the members of the host nation, or belligerents, as their only weapon -this is hardly a comforting thought for the professional soldier.<sup>10</sup> It is unrealistic to expect a military force shackled by overly restrictive ROE to produce the type of decisive results that we ordinarily associate with victory.<sup>11</sup> In attempting to reach a consensus with our coalition partners on common ROE, we must never compromise the overriding principle of self-defense.

## DIVERSE COALITION ROE IN MOOTW - EXAMPLES

### Operation Provide Comfort - Diverse ROE for Use of Force

In 1991, the leader of the Kurdish Democratic Party requested foreign aid for the three million Kurds who had fled to the northern mountains of Iraq. It was estimated that up to 1500 Kurds were dying per day from disease, cold, and hunger.<sup>12</sup> The request ultimately resulted in the formation of a Combined Task Force (at first was a EUCOM Joint Task Force) in which thirteen nations participated directly and for which a total of thirty nations provided humanitarian supplies. Each military force that participated in the operation had its own national ROE, many being more restrictive than the U.S. ROE.

One example of these diverse ROE was the policy of the French regarding their use of force in defense of other coalition members. The French ROE allowed their infantry platoons to fight for individual coalition soldiers under Iraqi or Kurd attack, but a French infantry platoon could not aid another coalition platoon under attack. The French ROE were tailored to minimize the amount of risk to French troops as they participated in the humanitarian operation and apparently the French made a political decision to only allow their forces to assist an individual coalition soldier who was in danger. This principle differed from the U.S. rules which allowed U.S. troops to use force for individual and collective self-defense, including the collective

defense of coalition forces.

The British troops were also operating under ROE which were much more restrictive than the U.S. ROE. British ROE would not allow the deployment of artillery battalions into Northern Iraq to support coalition or British forces. This limitation was based on Britain's national policy that artillery should not be deployed since it was a humanitarian operation. The use of artillery was further inhibited by the Turkish Rules of Engagement which prohibited coalition forces from establishing artillery firing positions within Turkey. The U.S. rules, on the other hand, permitted artillery battalions to position themselves in Northern Iraq to protect U.S. and coalition forces from hostile Kurds and Iraqis.<sup>13</sup>

This situation highlights the problems associated with nations' differing interpretations of how much force is authorized in peace operations, which inevitably leads to confusion among coalition partners. Moreover, the reluctance of coalition partners to use any force may place additional risk on U.S. forces because of the inability of their partners to defend them. Overly restrictive ROE may also inhibit the overall mission of the peace operation because it may limit the coalition's ability to assist humanitarian efforts by warding off hostile elements within the host nation. These problems may have been avoided if the coalition forces had adopted common, robust

ROE for this mission or if the partners had developed a memorandum of understanding(MOU) to ensure that coalition members were aware of the parameters for the use of force by their partners.

#### **Operation Maritime Guard/Sharp Guard - Common Coalition ROE/Differing National Perspectives**

Even when coalition forces adopt common ROE, problems may still arise in the implementation of those rules. The enforcement of the embargo off the coast of the former Yugoslavia serves as both a positive and negative example of the effectiveness associated with common coalition ROE.

In 1992, both NATO and the Western European Union (WEU) began coalition operations to conduct the enforcement of the embargo off the coast of Bosnia-Herzegovina. In early 1993 these operations were consolidated into Operation Sharp Guard - a Combined Task Force divided into three Task groups which rotated positions in the Adriatic. The overwhelming success of this operation, as a coalition effort, has been noted by senior military leaders.<sup>14</sup> The success of this embargo enforcement was largely due to the fact that communication was effectively coordinated through the Datalink II system, operational commanders met regularly to discuss locations where their platforms would operate, nations conducted training and practiced boardings prior to moving into the Adriatic, and the Combined

Task Force was operating under common and robust coalition ROE.<sup>15</sup>

The success of the ROE was attributable to the fact that the nations agreed on the purpose of the mission and adopted common ROE which reflected the need for coalition forces to engage in "mutual self-defense". This concept of mutual self-defense which was practiced during the Gulf War, "gives a ship's Commanding Officer the authority to interpret an attack against a nearby friendly ship as an attack against his vessel."<sup>16</sup> Coalition forces positioned their fleets and used patrol techniques which reflected an appreciation of this concept. The ROE for this operation were "encouragingly robust" and the rules that were generated expressly for the operation left no one in doubt that the forces meant business.<sup>17</sup> Rear Admiral Martinotti, Italian Navy and Commander of NATO's Standing Naval Force Mediterranean, noted the success of coalition interaction in this operation and attributed the success to the "commonality" of the operation.

Military forces committed to coalition operations often find that they are in a position to "serve two masters." They are forced to balance the interests of their own nation with the interests of the coalition they support.<sup>18</sup> It is obvious that the common ROE in Operation Sharp Guard effectively reduced the problems of "serving two masters," but even with common ROE the operation demonstrated other complexities involved with coalition

interaction. One potential problem, that never became an issue since no shots were fired during the embargo, arose because of nations' different interpretations of how to apply force authorized by the ROE. The second issue concerned a U.S. Cruiser Commander's political concerns over implementing the use of force pursuant to the coalition ROE. Political agendas shape the inclination for nations to apply force even with commonly adopted ROE.

In April 1994, NATO forces were operating off the coast of Bosnia to enforce the terms of the UN embargo. During this evolution a Navy Cruiser sighted a foreign flagged oil tanker making its way into a Bosnian port. When the Cruiser asked the NATO commander, a British Commodore, for guidance concerning the interception of the tanker, the U.S. forces were told that the ROE authorized the use of disabling fire if it became necessary to stop the tanker. Even though the Commanding Officer of the Cruiser knew that disabling fire was authorized, he was concerned about the political implications since, up to that point, no U.S. warship had fired shots in the Adriatic. The Commanding Officer sought guidance from higher authority was told that he should follow the direction of the NATO Commodore, and issue disabling fire if commanded to do so. By the time this issue was sorted out, however, the oil tanker had changed course and was receiving an escort from a Bosnian ship. Although the tanker was

eventually intercepted and escorted without the issuance of disabling fire, the incident demonstrates how national political concerns may weigh on a commander's decision to implement coalition ROE.<sup>19</sup> The situation merely highlighted the complexities associated with implementation of ROE where nations have varying political concerns. Confusion in the application of ROE may result in undue delay or increased risk because of the evolving situation.

Another concern highlighted by this mission was that the U.S. and the other coalition partners had very different interpretations of what constituted disabling fire. Typically, the U.S. interprets use of disabling fire to mean the firing of rounds into the engineering spaces of the ship that is in violation of the terms of the embargo. In this particular situation, even though it did not become necessary, it was a Dutch ship that was tasked with issuing disabling fire against the tanker that was violating the embargo. The Dutch method of issuing disabling fire is to launch rounds into the bridge of the ship. Obviously this interpretation carries with it a greater risk to human life, and it is necessary for the U.S. and other coalition partners to understand the potential political ramifications and to support this action. Because the purpose of ROE is to shape the application of military force to conform with national policy objectives, the implementation of the ROE must



support each nation's political objectives as well as supporting the coalition objectives.

#### MANAGING THE PROBLEM OF DIVERSE COALITION ROE - Suggestions for the Operational Commander

Each nation-state brings its own political agenda into any military operation. Issues that are critical to the national or diplomatic interests of one country will not necessarily be important to the other coalition partners. Because these complexities will often make an already cloudy peace operation even more confusing, it is imperative that the governments coordinate to reach a common understanding of the ROE. There should be no ambiguity between the political goals of the coalition and the tactical mandates given to the military forces that are deployed to achieve those objectives.

One solution would be for all coalition partners to meet prior to the beginning of the peace operation so that each nation's respective operational commander could coordinate to adopt common ROE. If common ROE are adopted, each participating nation should agree on the meaning and implementation of the adopted rules. It is critically important that common ROE reflect each nation's military and political views on the use of force for the operation. Compromises should be made, where feasible, but no nation should agree to rules that they will not be able to implement because of political constraints and

national self-interests. Common ROE will only be effective if they truly are "common" and each coalition partner can be assured that the other partners will follow those rules. U.S. commanders should not be placed in a situation where they are counting on the assistance of either weapons or troops of foreign forces if those forces will be reluctant to follow the common ROE because of national concerns. Moreover, the common ROE will only be effective if they are robust and contain language which give coalition forces the ability to accomplish the peace mission and to protect coalition forces while accomplishing that mission.

Although common ROE would result in a more cohesive coalition, with increased interoperability, the diversity of separate national interests may make the idea of common ROE virtually impossible. For example, a particular nation may never see a situation where they should come to the aid of other coalition troops by using force against members of the host nation. A nation may believe that its reputation as a peacemaker or peacekeeper will be harmed if they act in defense of a third party. Even if common coalition ROE are adopted, there may still be problems associated with differing interpretations of the language, as seen in the Bosnia example. If it proves impossible to agree on common ROE, operational commanders should, at a minimum, draft and sign a memorandum of understanding between all members of the coalition. This MOU should clearly articulate the

contents of each nation's ROE, thereby putting other coalition members on notice of these rules. The agreement should clearly define the circumstances under which each nation will use force, both in self-defense and in defense of other coalition partners. The memorandum should also outline the geographical parameters for the placement of forces and use of weapons, and it should specify the type of weapons that are authorized for each nation. From a detailed MOU, military leaders can then interpret the military and political impact of these differing rules and provide instruction to tactical commanders on how to deal with the problems diverse rules will present in the case of hostilities. It is critical for the operational commander to know the limits of the application of force that will be implemented by his coalition partners.

#### CONCLUSION

The complexities of coalition operations are heightened when forces are involved in peace operations. Because all nations will become more involved in these missions, the problems associated with ROE must be considered well in advance of the operation. The operational commander's foremost concern must be to ensure that the complexities associated with differing ROE do not put U.S. forces at risk. In order to achieve maximum unity of effort within the coalition, each nation should seek to coordinate and cooperate on the ROE for the mission. Common

robust ROE, or at least a common understanding of the ROE, will not only enhance interoperability and unity of effort but will minimize the risk to coalition personnel while strengthening the military and political cohesiveness within the partnership.

## ENDNOTES

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6. Charles Moskos, quoted in John F. Hillen III, "UN Collective Security: Chapter Six and a Half", Parameters, Spring 1994, p. 27.
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13. Personal Notes of COL Donald G. Goff, USA, J3, Joint Task Force Bravo, Zahko, Iraq, Operation Provide Comfort.
14. See Admiral M. Boorda's comments as quoted in John R. Roos, "Orchestrating Airdrops to Bosnia and Enforcing the Shipping Embargo Against the Former Yugoslavia, and see Rear Admiral Enrico Martinotti's, Italian Navy, comments as quoted in "Point Man in Yugoslav Embargo," in Armed Forces Journal International, May 1993.

15. Ibid.

16. Rear Admiral Enrico Martinotti as quoted in Roos, p. 29.

17. CAPT Fabian Hiscock, Royal Navy, "Operation Sharp Guard," The Naval Review, July 1994, p. 224, 226.

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